

THE SEVENTH COUNCIL

of the

Reformed Churches Through-
out the World.

The Bible and the Reformed Churches.

THE OPENING SERMON

BY

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I Peter, 1, 23. Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever.

I am sure that I express a feeling common to us all when I say, that it is with singular propriety that the Council of the Reformed Churches throughout the World is met in the Capital of the United States of America. For the constitutive idea of these Churches, operating as a historical force through their membership in America, exerted a powerful influence in securing for these States an independent life, and, when that had been secured, in organizing their Federal Government. Nor will it be denied that throughout the entire period, which began with the beginning of the national life, the Reformed Churches in America have been a factor of the first importance among those which have determined the Nation's political, social, and religious development.

These striking and acknowledged historical facts almost compel us, on this occasion, to direct our attention to what I have called the constitutive idea of the Reformed Churches. And I shall have you with me in the statement that this idea is to be found in the attitude of these Churches toward the Holy Bible. This attitude is embodied in the well-known phrase of William Chillingworth: "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants." It involves the two great propositions that the Holy Scriptures are the supreme rule

of religious faith and conduct, and that being sufficient and perspicuous, they do not need, for religious purposes, the mediation of the Church as either witness or interpreter. Of course, this is the attitude of all the Protestant Churches. But in the Reformed Churches the conviction of its importance has been so profound and its influence has been so dominant and continuous that their attitude toward the Bible has been their most distinctive note. While other Churches have emphasized their Catholicity or their Apostolicity, the Reformed Churches have emphasized their loyalty to Holy Scripture. They have believed that they themselves would stand or fall with the Bible; and they have felt that no greater honor could be paid to them than to call them, by eminence, the Churches of the Book. And since their genesis as Reformed was due to their secession from the Latin Church because, as they claimed, that Church had misinterpreted and obscured the Bible; and since they claimed to have rehabilitated the Bible by making it their distinctive standard and their supreme law, we, at least, who are their successors and believe their claim to have been justified, may well employ, to describe their origin as Reformed, the words of the Apostle Peter, and assert that they were born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.

It would be far from the truth to say that the Reformed Churches stand alone in their attachment to and dependence on the Holy Scriptures. The Great Roman Church, in which Mediaeval Christianity still survives, asserts not less clearly and strenuously than ourselves their divine inspiration and authority. But it places tradition side by side with Scripture, and of both Scripture and tradition it makes the teaching Church both the authoritative witness and the interpreter. It would require more time than custom allots to this opening sermon adequately to acknowledge the indebtedness of

Christendom to the Anglican Communion for the great literature which its divines of every school have written in the defense and the interpretation of the Bible. Were this contribution to be subtracted from the body of Christian literature, the loss to the world would be incalculable. But such has been the emphasis placed by Anglicanism on its claim to historic orders, and such has been its dalliance with the idea of a priestly clergy, that it is probable that the dominant party of its clergy is prepared, not only to disclaim the name Protestant, but also to attack the distinctively Protestant attitude toward Holy Scripture.

The attitudes of the Roman and the Anglican Churches, just noticed, serve to bring out clearly the significance of the Reformed Churches' contention, that the Bible alone is the rule of religious faith. Claiming neither a priestly character for their clergy nor anything like magical virtue for their sacraments, and setting no high value, indeed, no religious value at all, on tactual successions in ordination, the peculiarity of their ministry has been that, relying on nothing else, they have held up the Bible as the Word of God, the revelation of His will, to be believed and studied and obeyed. For though they co-ordinated with the Bible prayer and the sacraments as means of grace, they found the sole ground of their belief in prayer's efficacy and the sole warrant for their sacraments in the Written Word.

The exaltation and exclusive employment of Holy Scripture produced in the Reformed Churches a distinctive type of Christian character; which I think we are justified in calling the intellectual type. Of course, in using this term, I am saying nothing about intellectual gifts and attainments. I am endeavoring to describe a religious type. And I am sure, that we may properly call that the intellectual type of Christian character, which is formed and nourished exclusively by Biblical truths; apprehended by the understanding, made ex-

plied by exposition, correlated with the fundamental truths of reason, organized into a system, and addressed, through the intellect, to the conscience and the will. As we all know, this is the type which is characteristic to-day, and always has been characteristic of the Reformed Churches of Europe and America. From their possession and cultivation of this type of religion it followed inevitably, that these Churches separated sharply the voluntary outgoing of the affections toward God from the necessary feelings which arise in the presence of beauty or sublimity; and that, recognizing the former only as having a religious character, they refused to employ the material fine arts as means to excite or to express religious devotion. Nor did it less inevitably follow from this intellectual habit, that they severely repressed all tendency to mysticism in themselves, and sometimes unjustly denounced it when it appeared in others.

It is not my purpose either to eulogize or to criticize the type of Christianity by which the Reformed Churches are thus distinguished. I am only endeavoring to be true to history, in describing the genius of the great family of Churches whose representatives we are. And, above all, I am trying to make clear that, because we have thoroughly abandoned the priestly claims and sacramentarianism of Mediaeval Christianity; and have denied ourselves, believing them delusive allies, the aid of the material fine arts; and have refused to surrender ourselves to the delicious charms of religious mysticism; in a word, because our type of Christianity is distinctively intellectual; we of all the Churches are, perhaps, most vitally interested in the fate of the Holy Bible. For if the Holy Bible were once discredited; what would be left to the Reformed Churches, but the platitudes of natural ethics, and the "half-starved and hunger-bitten dogmas" of natural religion; not seen in the dim aisles of cathedrals or in the shaded groves of mysticism, but scrutinized in the clear light of the open day?

This, undoubtedly, has been the view of the Reformed Churches themselves. Their profound and abiding conviction, that the cause of the Bible and the cause of supernatural religion are one, they have asserted in many ways in every period of their history. They have affirmed it in the plainest terms in their Confessions;

they have made the Bible the supreme judge in religious controversies. Turning away from Visible Churches, which they held might apostatize, and from Ecclesiastical Councils, which they asserted might err, to God himself, speaking in his written Word, they have repaired to the Bible alone as to the sufficient revelation of God's nature and will, the highest rule, and the one unimpeachable witness in religion. Their system of doctrine, they have defended only as founded on and issuing from Holy Scripture. Beginning with John Calvin, the father of modern Biblical interpretation, their divines have yielded to those of no other Church in their endeavors, by historical and grammatical study, to ascertain the Bible's exact text and precise significance; for in their belief the phrases, "Scripture saith" and "God saith," are synonymous and interchangeable. The public teachings of their pulpits have been expositions of the Word. Their historic songs of praise have been its inspired lyrics. Though the most of these Churches, at first, employed fixed forms in their public worship, the feeling among them was unanimous, that a stately uniformity, though in itself desirable, would be too dearly bought, if an imposed liturgy were suffered to compete with the Holy Bible for the affections of their people. This Bible, they made the fundamental text book of childhood and youth in the home and the parochial school. The duty of its regular devotional study by the people throughout life, they enforced by their Directories, by the character of their Catechisms, and by the teachings of their pulpits. Its translation into the tongues of the peoples among whom they labored has been among the chief cares of their missionaries in foreign lands; and no Churches have been more enthusiastic or more generous in securing for it the widest circulation, without note or comment, as the people's Book of books. In no way, perhaps, has the devotion of these Churches to the cause of the Bible been shown more clearly, than in the promptness and vigor and spirit of their apologetics in its behalf. Against every assault, they have furnished abundant defenders, equal in ability and learning to the task the assault created and animated by the spirit which nerves men only when they are fighting for what they hold most dear.

We need not be disturbed if we have to confess that not always have those, representing the Reformed Churches, rightly read the Holy Bible, or that sometimes they have made the Word of God responsible for their errors and excesses. It would have been strange, indeed, if they had not, now and again, misinterpreted or misapplied it. What Church has not at times affirmed moral quality of things indifferent; or reached conclusions concerning God's will after a narrow induction of Scripture; or, in the strain of battle, been pushed by the foe into indefensible positions? But the final judgment of history on a great institution is determined, not by exceptional falls or aberrations, but by its whole career and its total influence on the life of the world. Judged in this large way, the Reformed Churches must be held to have been one of the most potent and beneficent forces in the life of Europe and America, since the Reformation of the sixteenth century. And the greatness and beneficence of their influence must be ascribed, most of all, to the exalted place and the all-important function these Churches have assigned to Holy Scripture.

The great and splendid story of the limitation of class privilege, of the enfranchisement of the people, of the social amelioration of the masses, of the care of the unfortunate, of the diminution of the horrors of war, of the popular and the higher education, of the deepening indignation throughout the world in the presence of cruelty or of outraged justice, and of advancing civil liberty and self-government prophesying the Commonwealth of man:—this story of the last three centuries will not be fairly told, if a large share of these achievements is not assigned these Reformed Churches; and if the reason of their share is not attributed to their attitude toward the written Word of God. Or, fixing our regard on the sphere of the distinctively religious life; if we only permit ourselves to judge our policy by its fruits, we need not fear that the Reformed Churches robbed the people, when, giving up the aids of a priestly clergy and the material fine arts and mysticism, they commended to the people the Word of God, to be devoutly studied as their only rule of religious faith and duty. In their adoring worship of the living God alone, in their confident faith in his forgiving mercy, through the merits of his Atoning Son, in their profound

view of sin, in their high ethical and deep spiritual conception of the religious life, in their abundant philanthropic and missionary labors and the large generosity by which these have been supported in their Catholic conception of the visible Church, and in the fraternal attitude toward other Churches by which they have given expression and effect to their conception; the Reformed Churches are entitled to say that they have made clear in their history, that the Holy Bible by itself begets and supports a type of piety as lofty, as devout, and as ethical and spiritual as any the Church has known. The vision of the Saviour of the world has never been dimmed or obstructed in our Churches or our homes; the graces of the Spirit have beautified the lives of our people; prayer has hallowed them; their characters have been made strong by the practice of the ethical virtues as Christian duties; and the whole world has known and recognized and rejoiced in their work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Noble as it is in itself and great and blessed as has been its mission to the world, the intellectual type of religion characteristic of the Reformed Churches is sometimes attended by a serious danger to faith. For, in a naturalistic age, the study of the Bible, by those to whom the right of private judgment has been accorded, may easily be transmuted into destructive criticism; so that the Bible will be interpreted with a view to the elimination of its supernatural history and doctrines, and, in the end, its rule over belief and life be rejected. We all know that this danger has been often insisted on as inhering in the very essence of Protestantism. We have been told that the words Protestantism and Rationalism, when employed to describe methods of dealing with the Bible, are convertible terms; and that, if we describe Protestantism by its historical influence, we must call it the mother of the modern disbelief of the Bible.

Now, so far as history is concerned, it is rarely, if it is ever, possible to say of any outbreak of unbelief, what its exact historical causes were. Most often, unbelief appears in the life of a nation or an age, quite suddenly and mysteriously. And it always appears as an assimilating force, nourishing itself on all prevailing modes of thought, until, finally, it exhausts itself and dies. The historian, in a succeeding age, is quite apt to mistake for

its historical cause some one of the many modes of thought by which, in its day, it was nourished. No doubt, in the eighteenth century, Deism in Great Britain fed itself on Protestantism. And there is just as little doubt that, in the same century, Deism in France fed itself on Romanism. But it would be inaccurate to say that Romanism was the responsible cause of Deism in France, or to say that Protestantism was its responsible cause in Great Britain. It would, indeed, be easy to construct a plausible argument for each contention. On the one hand it could be urged, that the free exercise of the human reason in the study of Scripture produced unbelief; and, on the other, that skepticism appeared as a reaction from the too large demands made upon faith. There would be a measure of truth in each of these statements. But the historical cause of the Deism of the eighteenth century would in neither case be told. The truth is, that the great problems of historical causation are never easy of solution. And before the action and re-action of the voluntary co-efficients in national life, we may well stand in modest silence, or confess with frankness our inability to proportion causes and effects in human history.

Nor has anyone a right to call the Protestantism of the Reformation essential Rationalism, because it substituted Scripture for the Church as the ultimate rule of faith, or because it bade the people employ whatever aid they could obtain in exploring the meaning of God's written Word. For faith in the supernatural was at the centre of the Reformation, just as truly as it was at the centre of Mediæval Christianity. Nor was this supernatural belief less real or less influential, because its specific object was the indwelling and illumining Divine Spirit giving spiritual efficacy to the written Word, instead of God communicating grace through a system of seven sacraments.

So much, we may rightly say against the charge that Protestantism legitimates religious unbelief. And yet we must, I think, confess, that when naturalistic modes of thought are prevalent and honored and influential; when second causes so hold men's attention that the First Cause is easily "removed far from them on the field of their contemplation," there is peculiar danger that we, especially of the Reformed Churches, shall be

powerfully tempted to let the spirit of the time control or strongly influence us in our study of the Bible; until we look askance at or minimize the miraculous in its history, and construe, by the laws of natural evolution, those great events which, as narrated in Holy Scripture, we had before interpreted as God's miraculous and gracious interruptions of the awful tragedy of a sinful and fallen race.

I do not presume to say, that a conscious naturalistic habit of mind is the source of what we have agreed to call the new Biblical criticism (of which we now hear so much), so far as its conclusions are defended within the Reformed Churches. We are bound to accept and to defend the sincerity of our own brethren in their disavowels of anti-supernaturalism, and in their assurances that, in accepting as ascertained truth the reconstruction of the history of Israel made necessary by their studies of the literary phenomena of the Old Testament, they still receive the Bible as the infallible rule of faith and practice, and are endeavoring, in full faith of the supernatural, to open the Scriptures to the people.

Nevertheless, we all know that the new criticism proposes a revolution in our interpretation of the Old Testament history, and is beginning to propose a like revolution in our interpretation of the New Testament history. In view of the fact that the Bible is not only supreme in our Church, but occupies an exclusive supremacy; and in view of that intellectual habit of religion, peculiar to us, on which I have already dwelt, it is not too much to say, that this proposal has produced in the Reformed Churches a serious crisis of belief, of which we are bound to take some notice in Councils like this in which we are gathered.

I say, we are bound to take notice of the present crisis of Biblical belief. It would be unintellectual optimism or sinful obscurantism to pass it by in silence. And, therefore, since the circumstances in which we are met have led me to speak of the supreme and exclusive place which the Reformed Churches have given to the Bible, I should be evading the very subject of my sermon if I did not go on to say a few words about the relation of the new criticism to our historical position; and to consider the interesting question, whether, if we accept the conclusions of the new criticism, we can still

hold by the Bible as our supreme rule in religious belief and conduct.

You will agree with me, that this historical attitude of our Churches toward the Bible, involves, at the least, the statements, that the Bible is one; that it is true; that it is inspired; and that it is self-evidencing. However we may define them, the Bible's unity, truth, inspiration and self-evidencing quality cannot be given up by us as Reformed Churches without a complete revolution. To set them aside would be for us, at least, to set aside the Bible. For there would be no meaning to our acceptance of the Bible, if we did not hold it as, in some sense, a unity, or, if we did not hold it, as in some sense, true; we could not call it a revelation, if we did not assign to God, in some sense, its authorship; and how could it oblige the people to receive it as their supreme rule of faith and duty, if it did not authenticate itself as the very Word of God to man?

What then do we mean when we say that we believe in the unity of the Holy Scriptures, or that we accept them as one Book? That we do say this we all know. It is implied in all our treatment of them, as well as in the name by which we most often describe them. Their units were, indeed, written at different times, and are in various literary forms; and a sharp line separates the elder writings from the later. Yet the sayings of St. Augustine, that "the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, the Old lies open in the New," and that "if we distinguish the times the Scriptures will agree," have commended themselves to the judgment of the Church. As to what this unity is, all the great divisions of the Catholic Church are agreed. The ecumenical creeds of the Patristic and the detailed confessions of the Reformation periods alike witness, that the unity of Scripture is precisely this: that it contains a system of supernatural truth concerning God and man and the relations between them; and that this system of truth, as it lies open in the New Testament, is implicit in the Old.

Now, how are we to maintain this unity of Scripture, if we accept the new critical view of the Old Testament which posits, as underlying the whole volume as at last compiled, a series of documents of which the several religious tendencies are in conflict? Or how are we to assert the unity of the Old and New Testaments, if we

concede that the Messianic idea, which dominates the New Testament, is derived, not from the prophets of the Old Testament, but from their prophetic utterances as mistakenly interpreted by the extra-canonical apocalyptic writers? Or how, finally, shall we hold to this unity, if we accept the conclusion that the Nicene theology is not yielded by the Bible, but is the product of Greek thought modifying, or rather revolutionizing the primitive Christianity, which was little more than a system of practical ethics joined to the worship of Jesus? I do not desire to be polemical. But these questions must be considered by us as organized Churches. We cannot escape them. And what more appropriate occasion could we find to propound them, than the occasion by which we are assembled?

Then there is the truth of the Bible. Need I say that, since these Reformed Churches have been organized on the basis that Holy Scripture is the supreme and infallible rule of faith and duty, we should be denying the fundamental principle by which we exist, if we did not hold to the truthfulness of the Bible? It must be trustworthy in our view, or it will be impossible for us to conceive of it as the judge in religious controversy. It is impossible, therefore, for us to escape the serious consideration of the question, whether the conclusions of the new criticism can be made to consist with the trustworthiness of the Bible. And that this question may be before us in a concrete way, I will select a striking example from the reconstructed history of Israel which the modern criticism almost unanimously assures us is made necessary by the literary study of the Old Testament.

The tabernacle, which is described at length and with such careful attention to details in the book of Exodus, we are told by the author of that book, was actually constructed by the appointment of Moses during the wandering in the wilderness, and was intended to be, and really was, the shrine of the sacrifices of the Levitical law, which was given by Moses at the same period. Now, what if I should be compelled to reach the conclusion, that the tabernacle, so described, was not ordered to be built by Moses; that in point of fact it was never built at all; that it is only an imaginative reconstruction of the temple of Solomon; and that the story of its construction was fabricated during the exile in the

interest of the priestly programme of that late period; and was intended to provide imaginatively a shrine of the Mosaic age for the Levitical sacrifices, which are said in the Pentateuch to have been prescribed by Moses, but with which Moses had no more to do than he had to do with the building of the tabernacle, which was never built at all? What, I say, if I should be compelled to reach this conclusion? In what sense could I say that I held to the truthfulness of the Old Testament? Could I hold to it in any sense? For the problem, you perceive, is not the mere problem of constructing a dogmatic definition of inspiration. Here is the narrative of the organization of the cultus of Israel at the beginning of its national life. It is the very narrative which dominates the whole succeeding history of Israel as it lies on the face of the Old Testament. That whole history is thus reconstructed in a way which it is tame to call revolutionary. And since the reconstruction has been made and defended with the greatest frankness, how can we help, with equal and reciprocal frankness, asking the question; but what, in this reconstruction of history, becomes of the truth, or the truthfulness, or the trustworthiness of the Old Testament?

Then, the Divine inspiration of the Bible is affirmed in all our Confessions. That this means, in some sense, the inbreathing of the Divine mind into the texture of Holy Scripture all are agreed. Nor shall we be less unanimous in our consent that the end of the inbreathing is not to give us scientific history, but to give to Holy Scripture a religious quality, and to make the Bible infallible in the sphere of faith and duty. And were Christianity a religion unrelated to human history, it were easy to conceive of its Sacred Books as thoroughly infallible in their religious teachings and yet erroneous in their historical narrative. But this is not Christianity as understood by the Reformed Churches, or as embodied in the ecumenical creeds. Is there a doctrine of the faith which is not implicated in and inseparable from events which occurred under the conditions of time and space? The fall of man, the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the coming of the Holy Ghost; what are these but historical events, bound, if taught at all, to be taught as history? Or, how are we to unite with our brethren in the Apostle's Creed, if we do not assent to its statement of the historic events,

that Jesus Christ our Lord was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, and was raised again the third day? I do not see how it is possible, however closely we confine the mission of inspiration to securing the religious infallibility of the Bible, to exclude the Biblical history. And if we include Biblical history at all, we may well ask those who exclude a portion of the history as not witnessed to by inspiration, to formulate the law of exclusion.

And, there is that self-evidencing quality of Holy Scripture, in virtue of which it obliges its acceptance by those to whom it is given. Of course, we shall all say, that what precisely is evidenced, is not immediately the history, but those doctrines, like the love of God and the forgiveness of sin, which can become elements of individual experience. But to evidence these is mediately to evidence the history with which they are necessarily allied.

Here, then, is the historical attitude of the Reformed Churches toward the Bible, and here, in sharp antithesis, is the new Biblical criticism demanding to be heard and accepted. It is perfectly clear, as I have already said, that we have reached a crisis of belief. Of the necessary result of the wide acceptance of the new critical conclusions on our Churches and people, it is unnecessary to speak at any length. We can all see that, in the event of such an acceptance, there will be a revolution in our ecclesiastical and religious life. It will be impossible for the Bible to continue to hold the supreme place it holds to-day; and, this ancient support of our ecclesiastical and religious life, having been withdrawn or weakened, many of us will seek some other support in its place or as its ally; like sacramentarianism with sacerdotal directors; or æstheticism with its gratifications; or mysticism with its vague but powerful emotions. I am inclined to believe, however, that because of the intellectual habit bred in our people and our churches by the education of almost four centuries, the first halting place of the most of us will be rationalism. We must not conceal from ourselves that exactly this disintegration has once and again befallen Reformed Churches, and there is no earthly guarantee that history will not repeat itself. And in this way we are brought to the profoundly

interesting question: "What is our duty as Churches and presbyters and people, in this crisis of belief?"

You will agree with me that it would be out of place to say anything, and, indeed, that it would not be possible to make any valuable remarks of a general character on the relation to the present crisis of the Church's power of discipline. For the right of discipline does not belong to this Council, but to each separate Church here represented. And since the complex conditions, under which each Church lives and does its work, differ from those of every other Church, each Church can, far more wisely than all of us combined, conclude in what cases to exercise and in what cases not to exercise judicial functions. But there are other duties of which I may appropriately speak; and I shall, in conclusion, speak briefly of three, which belong, respectively, to the intellect, the feelings, and the will:

Our intellectual duty is obvious. It is to meet the demands of the Biblical critics with rigid scrutiny and with counter criticism. And here I will take the liberty to say that the value of the higher criticism, as an instrument of knowledge, is apt to be grossly exaggerated by those who employ it. No one will deny that it is an important adjunct to historical testimony when the latter is aiding us toward conclusions in which the mind will rest content. But in cases where there is no historical testimony, and in cases especially in which it antagonizes historical testimony, the evidence is abundant that because it is purely subjective and individual and, therefore, under no laws which can be approximately formulated, the higher criticism has been changeful in method, capricious in opinion, and temporary in its conclusions. In the nature of the case its processes can end in nothing more solid than a working hypothesis, when there is no testimony beside the literary phenomena which it is scrutinizing. And unless this happens to be the only hypothesis possible in the circumstances (and that can rarely happen), its conclusions can never command permanent and contented belief.

Take, for example, the case of the first book of the Bible. Let us grant, if you will, that the higher criticism has made clear, that you can explain all its literary traits, on the supposition that it is a late compilation of several documents, each of which has a religious tendency different from the tendencies of the others. In granting this we grant everything that by literary criti-

cism can possibly be proven. But is this particular hypothesis the only one to which its literary phenomena can be made to respond? I should say that, given twenty acute and speculative minds, it would be possible to construct as many different hypotheses of the book's origin, of each of which you could as justly say: "It accounts for every literary phenomenon in the book." And is the Book of Genesis peculiar in its susceptibility to this speculative division into conflicting documents? It is not peculiar at all. This susceptibility is a trait which it has in common with every piece of literature the world contains. If you care to be speculative, you can ravel out the Epistle to the Romans, the parable of the prodigal son, or of the good Samaritan, any oration of Edmund Burke, or any essay of Lord Macaulay, into constituent documents of conflicting tendencies, and the literary phenomena of the object you are raveling will all be accounted for. Can conclusions reached in this way ever amount to more than provisional hypotheses? If they shall command general and permanent belief, it will be more than they have done in the past.

And, certainly, it goes without saying, that they can never serve as the basis of positive religious institutions, organized to evoke devout emotions and to constrain to self-sacrificing lives. I believe, therefore, that the intellectual duty which presses most severely on the Reformed Churches to-day, is not the duty of concessive apologetics, but the cheerful and by no means difficult task of pointing out to the new Biblical critics, the very serious limitations of their method as an instrument of knowledge, and its more serious limitations as a power to compel general or permanent conviction—limitations which they, like the most of their predecessors, appear to have ignored or forgotten. I am well aware, and we are often told, that the new Biblical criticisms derive great force, at present, from the prevailing naturalistic habit of mind. Precisely so. Their greatest power is derived, not from the higher criticism, but from the present mighty naturalistic drift. This is exactly my contention—that but for this present tendency toward naturalism as a theory which will explain all religions, the conclusions of the new criticism could not, in the nature of the case, be widely accepted or strongly held. If this be true,—and I believe it to be true,—then now, as always, naturalism is the foe which confronts us. We

know it well. We have met it often in many guises; and the recollection of our past battles should forbid fear, on our part, as to the result of another conflict.

Our great duty in the sphere of the feeling, is the duty of charity. It may well cause us anxiety, that, in a degree not to be affirmed of previous movements of the kind, this movement has taken possession of earnest, able and sincere minds within our Churches. Of course, this should make us more alert and vigilant. At the same time, we should not forget the sincerity and the devoutness of those who are our brethren, and who, inconsistent as they appear clearly to us to be, are still praying and laboring and sacrificing, in order to honor Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the World. Let us remember, that perhaps no one of us is thoroughly consistent intellectually; and let us remind ourselves, even in the midst of our conflicts for the faith, that as the greatest of the graces is charity, so it is the most difficult to maintain and exhibit when we are engaged in theological warfare.

Finally, our great duty in the sphere of the will is to pray. Never does the Christian's will energize more mightily and to more blessed purpose than when in profound faith in Jesus Christ he seeks a spiritual benediction from Almighty God. And surely our Churches can never pray with stronger confidence, than when they appeal to him in behalf of the cause of Holy Scripture. Let us pray, then, for a deeper faith in the Holy Bible. Let us pray that we may revere it more highly, and study it more devoutly, and believe it more implicitly, and obey it more heartily. Let us pray for the illuminating Spirit. And let us remember, brethren, the years of the right hand of the Most High. As we remember them, our faith will grow strong. We shall be sure that the present crisis of belief will pass away, and that a new Revival like the Reformation of the sixteenth, or the Evangelical awakening of the eighteenth century, will bless our Reformed Churches. In the blessed atmosphere of that revival it may be that some one, who shall stand in the place I occupy to-day, will employ, to describe our revived belief and obedience, the words of the Apostle—We are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.

